

Lehi Yesteryears

By Richard Van Wagoner

John Hutchings

Many citizens do not know the history of the John Hutchings Museum. This was written by Richard Van Wagoner in the Lehi Free Press.

John Hutchings was born in Lehi on March 11, 1889 to William L. and Mary Wanlass Hutchings. As a young boy John displayed a keen curiosity in natural history. Encouraged by a supportive mother, by age five he was collecting Indian artifacts and other items that captured his fancy.

While serving an LDS mission in Illinois (1908-11), his entire collection was stolen. Undaunted, he started anew. He had to begin yet again when his second collection was pilfered while he was away working in the mines at Scranton. Hutchings was still unfazed; his collecting hobby became a life-long passion--which was fortunately shared by his wife Eunice and their children.

From 1918-48 Hutchings was employed by the U.S. Postal Service. He worked first as a horse-and buggy-driving rural carrier, and later as a walking mailman. The sooner his daily mail route was completed, the more time he had for pursuing his hobby. The family spent much time, especially weekends and holidays, on adventurous exploring expeditions searching for items to add to their collection.

After retiring from the post office in 1948, John and Eunice devoted virtually all their time to caring for and adding to their collection. Their massive collection soon filled several

outbuildings, much of their yard, and all spare space in the house at 678 North 200 West.

Only about 20 percent of the more than 150,000 items on their property could be displayed, so the Hutchings decided to take the steps necessary to make the items more accessible to the public.

The Lehi Lions Club announced in the April 1, 1954 "Lehi Free Press" that a tentative agreement had been reached with John Hutchings to donate his entire collection to a "non-political, non-profit corporation" which would be named the John Hutchings Museum of Natural History.

Harvard Hinton, local attorney and Lions Club member, drew up the articles of incorporation. These were signed by John Hutchings on May 2, 1955 and accepted by the State of Utah in January 1956. The document specified that the eight-member Board of Trustees would include four members to be elected or appointed by descendants of John Hutchings and four Lehi citizens to be elected by the fifty-member Board of Directors.

In addition to corporation president Harold Hutchings, charter trustee members included LaMar (Bud) Hutchings, Esther Hutchings Hebrew, Laurel Hutchings Merrell, Dr. Elmo Eddington, Russell Innes, George Strasburg, and Garn Holbrook. John Hutchings was named the museum's curator-for-life.

Under provisions of the incorporation, John and Eunice Hutchings permanently relinquished their collection. Neither the museum nor any funds would revert back to the Hutchings family. In the event the corporation were to cease, certain provisions allowed for the collection's donation to a church, educational, or other non-profit, non-political institution."

The first goal of the museum board was to build a new facility for housing the

Hutchings' overflowing collection. The Alpine District Board of Education agreed to lease a site south of the Lehi Elementary School to the museum board for ninety-nine years. This one-hundred-sixty-feet wide and two-hundred-twenty feet deep piece of property (part of the old William Hutchings homestead) provided an east frontage at 649 North Center.

Plans for the new museum building were drawn by architect Lorenzo S. Young in 1956. The design of the nearly 5,000-square feet facility included five large display rooms, preparation and storage rooms, an information office and rest rooms. The fundraising kickoff was held in November of 1956, when the Lehi Lions Club donated \$600 toward the project's estimated \$60,000 cost excluding labor.

Though the Lions Club and the Federation of Lehi Women's Clubs were at the forefront in fund raising efforts, most Lehi citizens participated in one form or another. The largest source of revenue was the annual Community Carnival at Wines Park, which started in the summer of 1958. Under the able direction of Virgil Peterson this event received strong support from local businessmen as well as church and civic organizations.

Highlighting the 1959 Community Carnival was the unveiling of a \$5,000 dollar bust-sized statue of John Hutchings. This bronze cast sculpture rendered by Dr. Avarð Fairbanks was commissioned by the Federation of Lehi Women's Clubs.

At the time of the museum's April 23, 1960 groundbreaking \$11, 941.21 had been raised. In 1962 the Lehi Centennial committee gave the museum what amounted to a \$4,000 gift when it donated the remaining eight-hundred copies of the "Lehi Centennial History" which soon sold out at \$5 a copy.

Ribbon-cutting ceremonies officially opening the Hutchings Museum were held on

May 7, 1965. E. Russell Innes, president of the Board of Trustees, conducted the program, after which Lehi Mayor Harold Westring and Miss Lehi, Elese Jackson, cut the red, white, and blue ribbon. Following the dedication nearly five hundred people were lead on tours of the museum by John and Eunice Hutchings. and other museum personnel.

Under the direction of Board of Trustees President Raymond H. Stewart, groundbreaking ceremonies for a thirteen-hundred fifty-square-foot addition to the museum were held on September 2, 1968. Completed the following year, this new portion was initially used to store items still at the Hutching's residence but was soon converted into display space.

Burglars struck at the museum in the early hours of July 1, 1975. The thieves gained entry by forcing a lock on the west entrance, cutting a chain, and then disabling the alarm. The intruders had apparently cased the museum beforehand and knew precisely what to steal. Valuable and quickly markable items such as precious and semi-precious gems, gold silver and platinum specimens, pearls ancient Chinese vases, jade, ivory, and soapstone carvings were missing. Also gone were the rarest guns in the weapons collection.

Within a month, Lehi Police Chief Berl Peterson reported the arrest of Donald M. Passborg in Salt Lake City. But with the exception of the weapons most of the stolen items were never recovered. Because the guns were required for evidence in the case, the Lehi police department was not successful in having them returned to the museum until the spring of 1977.

Lehi citizens were greatly saddened on June 1, 1977 when museum founder and curator John Hutchings died at the age of eighty-eight. Widely acclaimed for his naturalist

work, he was best remembered locally for his interest in youth groups. Hundreds of Boy Scouts received training under his patient guidance as a scoutmaster and merit badge counselor.

Also notable were his personally conducted tours for thousands of school children through his museum. He was endowed with numerous awards and honors; the Sons of the Utah Pioneers in 1967 named John and Eunice as the Outstanding Couple of the State of Utah.” After Hutchings’ death his son Harold became the museum’s curator and still retains that position today. (not current-written in).

The Hutchings Museum has won national and international accolades for the depth and variety of its collection. The Pioneer Room captures the interest of town people because of the local flavor. Lehi’s first fire engine--the 1901 hand pumper splendidly restored-- is on display there. So is the hand bell from the New West School, most items from the Tabernacle’s cornerstone, and a photographic array of prominent people and buildings from the past.

Those with a sense of nostalgia for the Old West are intrigued by the multitude of artifacts from Camp Floyd. There are also over two hundred guns in a collection which includes a Springfield rifle (the official weapon of the Civil War) and a Winchester 73 (the “gun that won the West”) which Seth Littleford found beside a skeleton in the Buckskin Mountains between Idaho and Nevada. A .32 short rimfire rifle which presumably belonged to Butch Cassidy was recovered from a cave in legendary Robber’s Roost. A pistol and handcuffs of notorious Porter Rockwell can be seen there, as well as Camp Floyd. Another interesting item in this room is a “Whistlin & Whittler’s” knife typical of the type used by

Mormon youths in Nauvoo to drive unwanted characters from the town.

Everyday pioneer living can be examined in the sturdy furniture, intricate glassware, butter churns, flat irons, boot pullers, fluters, mechanics' tools, and a razor strop for sharpening great-grandfather's razor or walloping his children's behinds.

Next door to the Pioneer Room is the Indian Room. John Hutchings' interest in natural history began with collecting arrowheads. Throughout his lifetime he discovered thousands of finely crafted arrow and spear points, grinding stones, grass and willow baskets, and pottery shards--most of them within a few miles of Lehi.

On of his most productive digs was the 1935 excavation of sites previously under Utah Lake's waters. The mid-1930's were Utah's driest years of record, and Utah Lake dropped to its lowest water level. At this time, the Hutchings family excavated more than twenty mounds, uncovering thousands of Indian artifacts.

The mineral room is a rock-hound's fantasyland. Flourescent minerals which are brilliantly highlighted by violet ray, infared, and black light displays seem of another world. Brightly polished stones, valuable gems, and heavy metals displays are also stunning. A section dedicated to mining has an old ore cart with considerable gear from bygone days. One of the rarest displays in this areas includes hundreds of unusual and intricate minerals forms taken from Timpanogos Cave. Now a major Utah tourist attraction, Timpanogos Cave was discovered by John Hutchings and others in 1915. Amateur and professional paleontologists alike have been notably impressed by Fossil Room displays of large number of prized fossils from various geologic periods. The dinosaur footprints are especially impressive.

The Bird and Reptile room was perhaps John Hutchings' personal favorite due to his

interest in taxidermy. As a youth he studied and practiced mounting small-to-increasingly-large birds and animals until his skills were finely honed. This room contains his life-like mountings of nearly fifty Utah County birds, which include perchers, swimmers, divers, waders, seed eaters, carrion eaters, birds of prey, gnat catchers, flycatchers, Gallinaceous birds (quail, grouse), woodpeckers, goat suckers, and hummingbirds. Also on display are 402 sets of mostly local bird eggs, with each clutch carefully mounted in a glass-covered container.

Scattered throughout the museum are other particularly interesting items such as Hutchings heirlooms brought to Lehi from England by John Hutchings' mother. These relics include an eighth-century Knights of the Round Table drinking cup made of horn lined with brass, several pieces of silver hand-engraved money of the Queen Anne period and an old seal of King James 1 made of amethyst.

Few communities are as fortunate as Lehi in having such a renowned resource as the John Hutchings Museum. The collection is superb, the displays well arranged, and the guides truly interested in pointing out unusual items and sharing colorful anecdotes. People from every state of the union and many foreign countries have been led through a museum tour by such dedicated guides as Mable Jones, Ruth Curtis, Lee Matheney, Beth Shelly, John Gates, Cecil Chamberlain, and various members of the Hutchings family.

John Hutchings believed we should "never let go out of Utah that which belongs in Utah." He meant the same for our own community as well. The Hutchings Museum belongs to the people of Lehi. And the recent agreement drawn up between Lehi City Corporation and the Hutchings Museum Board of Directors virtually guarantees the long-term future of our

famous institution.